Let's Talk About ...

Cerebral palsy

If the brain does not develop normally—before, during, or immediately after birth, there can be changes in brain tissue. These changes can result in cerebral palsy (CP), a condition that causes problems with movement. These problems may come from weakness, poor muscle coordination, spasticity (spaz-TISS-it-tee), or muscle stiffness.

What causes cerebral palsy?

The cause of cerebral palsy is not known in about half of the cases. Several factors may be associated with the condition:

- Premature birth
- Low birth weight
- Infections while in the womb
- Strokes while in the womb
- Lack of oxygen
- Abnormal fetus development



What are the symptoms of cerebral palsy?

Children who have cerebral palsy may:

- Walk on their toes
- Be unable to walk, talk, or eat
- Have difficulty learning
- Difficulty swallowing
- Seizures
- Bowel and bladder problems
- Poor vision and hearing Behavioral difficulties

How is cerebral palsy diagnosed?

Your child's healthcare provider will ask about your child's medical history. They will ask if your child was premature, if there were any difficulties with delivery, and if you think they are developing normally. The healthcare provider will check your child's movement patterns and reflexes. They may order an MRI, a machine that can take electronic pictures of the brain. The healthcare provider may also order other lab tests or genetic tests that will help diagnose cerebral palsy.

How is cerebral palsy managed?

Each child is different, and your child will have a special treatment plan to meet their individual needs. Talk to your child's doctors and therapists if you have concerns about any part of their treatment. Cerebral palsy is complicated, and the best treatment is not always clear. You know your child best and can help their care providers understand the problems they are facing. You can help decide which treatments are best for your child.

How is my child's motor impairment treated?

Your child will probably have physical and occupational therapy. They may need splinting and casting. At home, your child will have strengthening and stretching programs. They will be encouraged to exercise.

If your child can walk, their therapists will help them walk as best they can. If they cannot walk well, they may be able to use a cane, walkers, or braces. Sometimes children can walk short distances but may need a wheelchair for longer distances. If your child cannot walk, they can be helped with their sitting ability. Therapists will also help your child use their hands to communicate better.

Doctors and therapists will try to improve your child's comfort and make it easier to care for your child.

How is my child's spasticity treated?

Spasticity is muscle stiffness. It can limit your child's function and lead to deformity. Medicines, injections, and surgery can help decrease spasticity.

Are there other medical issues associated with cerebral palsy?

Children with cerebral palsy may have to deal with other problems, including:

- Seizures
- Acid reflux
- Eating and getting enough nutrition
- Bladder function
- Constipation

- Sleep
- Osteoporosis (os-tee-o-per-O-sis), or losing bone mass
- Vision and hearing loss
- Dental issues

What long-term issues may affect my child?

Musculoskeletal (mus-ku-low-SKEL-it-tal) problems

Some children with CP gradually develop conditions that affect their bones and joints. Their hips can slip from the sockets. They may also have scoliosis (sko-lee-0-sis), a condition where the spine gradually curves to the side.

Learning difficulties

A child with learning difficulties may need cognitive (COG-nit-ev) rehabilitation or specialized educational programs.

Maturity issues

Your child's care team will help them deal with the unique issues they will face as they transition to adulthood.

Communication problems

Children with cerebral palsy may understand more than they can communicate. Therapies and technology can help your child.

Where can I find support?

Your child will have a team of providers specially trained in helping children with cerebral palsy. Their healthcare providers and therapists will help them with social skills, recreation, independence, and the transition from pediatric to adult providers.

Primary Children's Hospital provides a family-tofamily support group. Talk to your social worker if you would like to meet with other CP families.

United Cerebral Palsy, the Utah Parent Center, and Idaho Parents Unlimited can provide support and information.

Notes			

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